

BE CAREFUL: POLITICS AHEAD

By Bill Irby, Minister, West Cobbs Street c/C, Athens AL

Like many Christians, I am interested in politics. Much of my historical education was in the area of the ideas men use to tie themselves together. My interest is therefore a bit more on the theoretical side than most. The subject is still compelling to thought, but I must be careful.

I am convinced that as a practical matter, Christians should be cautious when in the vicinity of politics. I think of the field of political theory as a child's see-saw or teeter-totter. On the one side there are the rights and interests of the individual and on the other side there are the rights and interests of the community. Much of politics is involved in finding a balance between these two poles of rights. Particularly when we get out on the end of either side, views tend to be firmly held. This allows for and even enhances opportunity for conflict.

We see this conflict every night on television and as we read the papers. One is right and the other is wrong. I will admit to having strong and I believe well-considered views in these matters. But as a Christian, I must be careful.

Let me explain. There are some issues in our society that become the subjects of governmental action that are by nature and description, moral issues. The right of the unborn to live is a moral issue. Abortion is wrong, not because one group of politicians is for it and another group is against it. It is wrong because it is wrong. God knew Jeremiah and David before they were born. They were small human beings, not disposable fetuses. Marriage is what it is described to be in the Bible. Departure from that description is a moral issue. Christians can, should and must be fervent in their opposition to such things.

But there are other issues in our society that are not so clearly moral. I have a strong preference for free-market capitalism. Even with its ups and downs, I think it is better than socialism or some other form of command economy. But I am sure I have brothers in Christ in this world who would disagree with me on this. I have a strong preference for a governmental system that defers to the interests of the individual over the group. But I know Christians who think differently. We could add to this list of non-moral points of possible political disagreement between brethren.

In either instance, whether the discussion is moral, economic, or of political science, the Christian must manifest care. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is Matthew 7:12: Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them. This is, of course, the Golden Rule. I have seen folks so disturbed with each other (in the church!) that they would hardly speak during the political season. We must allow the Golden Rule to order all our interaction with each other.

The other reason to exercise caution during the political season is that this world is not our home. We must "*look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*" (2 Corinthians 4:18). In the ultimate analysis, material things do not matter at all. This life is all about doing God's Will so that we may join Him in Heaven.

Old brother David Lipscomb argued that the Christian should not be involved with the civil government, not even voting. I do not agree with his position on civil government, but his arguments were strong. Brother Lipscomb saw the church torn apart by the Civil War. Christians placed the North or the South before the Lord. This stark choice is not before us now, thank God. Still and all...let's be careful.